

YOUTH SUICIDE AWARENESS AND PREVENTION MODEL POLICY



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Youth Suicide Awareness and Prevention

Pursuant to [Section 170.048, RSMo](#), in 2017 the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) developed a model policy regarding youth suicide awareness and prevention. This policy was developed in cooperation with the Missouri Departments of Mental Health, Social Services, and Health and Senior Services, and the Missouri School Boards' Association. Additionally, practitioners working within the school system, as well as representatives from other organizations with expertise in youth suicide awareness and prevention, have participated in the development and revision of this document.

DESE conducted a survey of local education agencies (LEAs) in 2021 and again in 2024. Edits/revisions were made to the model policy based on feedback received, along with review of the current Missouri Suicide Prevention Plan, Suicide Prevention and 988 Guide for Schools, and other documents outlining best practices in youth suicide awareness and prevention. DESE is grateful for the collaboration of the many professionals from organizations and institutions across the state for their selfless and dedicated work on this model policy and each of its revisions.

This model policy may be adopted by Missouri LEAs to meet the requirements of [Section 170.048, RSMo](#), which provides

1. By July 1, 2018, each district shall adopt a policy for youth suicide awareness and prevention, including plans for how the district will provide for the training and education of its district employees.
2. Each district's policy shall address and include, but not be limited to, the following:
 - 1) Strategies that can help identify students who are at possible risk of suicide;
 - 2) Strategies and protocols for helping students at possible risk of suicide; and
 - 3) Protocols for responding to a suicide death.

This model policy is intended to serve as a template for LEAs in developing suicide prevention policies. LEAs are encouraged to adapt and customize the model policy to best address and meet the needs of the school community. See Appendix A for a list of resources to aid in the development of policy and procedures and Appendix B for resources to support implementation.

Youth Suicide Awareness and Prevention Model Policy

Purpose Statement

Suicide is a leading cause of death among youths in Missouri and is a public health concern impacting all Missouri citizens ([Department of Health and Senior Services](#)). The purpose of this policy is to provide for the health, safety, and well-being of all students by having procedures in place to prevent, assess the risk of, intervene in, and respond to suicide.

This policy outlines key protocols and procedures this LEA will use to educate employees and students on the actions and resources necessary to prevent suicide and promote student well-being. The goal of this LEA is to help students who may be at risk of suicide without stigmatizing or excluding them from school. No student may be excluded from school based solely on the LEA's belief that he or she is at risk of suicide.

The LEA will address suicide awareness and prevention through the following policy components:

1. Prevention (training, education, and identification of students who are at possible risk of suicide):
 - a. Suicide prevention and response protocol training and education for staff
 - b. Suicide prevention education for students
 - c. Suicide prevention information and resources for staff, students, and families
 - d. Crisis team
2. Intervention/crisis response (strategies and protocols for supporting students at possible risk for suicide):
 - a. Identification of students who may be at risk for suicide
 - b. Crisis response procedures
 - c. Considerations
3. Postvention support (protocols for responding to suicidal behavior or death by suicide in the school community):
 - a. Response to incidents impacting the school community
 - b. Supporting students at school following a suicide attempt or hospitalization

Publication of Policy

The LEA will notify employees, students, and parents/guardians of this policy by posting it on the LEA's website. Information may also be shared in appropriate LEA publications and student handbooks.

Definitions

Crisis Team (CT) – A multidisciplinary team of administrative staff, mental health professionals, safety professionals, and support staff whose primary purpose is to address crisis preparedness, intervention, response, and recovery.

At-risk – Suicide risk exists on a continuum. Any level of risk requires response and intervention by the school and the LEA in collaboration with a student's parent or guardian. A student who is defined as at-risk for suicide may have made a suicide attempt, have the intent to die by suicide, or have displayed a significant change in behavior suggesting the onset of potential mental health conditions or a deterioration of mental health.

Suicide Attempt – A self-injurious behavior for which there is evidence that the person had at least some intent to die.

Suicidal Behavior – Suicide attempts, injury to oneself associated with at least some level of intent, developing a plan or strategy for suicide, gathering the means for a suicide plan, or any other overt action or thought indicating intent to end one's life.

Suicidal Ideation – Thinking about, considering, or planning for self-injurious behavior that may result in death.

Prevention: Training, Education, and Identification of Students Who Are at Possible Risk of Suicide

Suicide Prevention and Response Protocol Training and Education for Staff (See also: Appendix C)

All LEA employees will receive information regarding this policy and the LEA's protocol for suicide awareness, prevention, intervention, and response when hired and all staff will review this information annually. The information will focus on the importance of suicide prevention, recognition of suicide risk factors, strategies to strengthen school connectedness, and response procedures and will include

- strategies that can help identify students who are at possible risk of suicide;
- strategies and protocols for helping students at possible risk of suicide; and
- protocols for responding to a death by suicide.

The LEA will also provide opportunities for staff to participate annually in professional development regarding suicide awareness and prevention pursuant to [Section 170.047, RSMo](#). Opportunities may include LEA-led training, access to web-based training, or training provided by other LEAs, organizations, or health professionals.

Suicide Prevention Education for Students

Students will receive age-appropriate information and instruction on suicide awareness and prevention. Mental health promotion including suicide awareness and prevention education should begin as early as possible within the context of best practices in school-based mental health.

Students will learn about:

- the importance of safe and healthy choices;
- mental health, coping strategies, and resilience;
- recognizing and responding to risk factors and warning signs of mental health concerns in oneself and others;
- identification of trusted adults with whom students can discuss concerns; and
- when and how to seek help for oneself or others, such as how to engage school resources and refer friends for help.

Information and instruction may be offered in health or physical education, in conjunction with the mental health awareness training pursuant to [Section 170.307 RSMo](#), through the school counseling comprehensive program, in other curricula, or in cooperation with other organizations or health professionals as appropriate.

This curricular content will occur throughout the school year, not just in response to a suicide. It is not recommended to deliver any programming related to suicide prevention to a large group in an auditorium setting.

Students with disabilities and students who are being evaluated due to suspected disabilities may participate in Mental Health Awareness and/or Suicide Prevention training to the extent appropriate determined by provision of the Individuals with Disabilities Act or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Such training should be coordinated with the child's case manager when a child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 plan documents the existence of suicidal ideation or other behaviors that could be exacerbated by participating in the training.

Suicide Prevention Resources and Information for Staff, Students, and Families

The LEA will, in collaboration with local organizations and the Missouri Department of Mental Health, identify local, state, and national resources and organizations that can provide information or support to staff, students, and families. Copies of or links to resources, such as the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, will be available to all students and families on the LEA's website and in all LEA schools.

Pursuant to [Section 170.048, RSMo](#), beginning July 1, 2025, identification cards issued to students in grades 7–12 shall include the three-digit dialing code that directs calls and routes text messages to the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (988) and the nonemergency phone number of the local police department.

Along with their identification card, students will be provided with information regarding reasons people might reach out to the 988 Lifeline (such as emotional support; mental health, suicide, or substance use crises; or worries about someone else) and how to access services via call, text, or chat.

Crisis Team (CT)

A building- or LEA-level CT is made up of professionals trained in suicide prevention, intervention/crisis response, and postvention support. Teams take a leadership role in developing crisis plans, ensuring school staff can effectively execute various crisis protocols, and designing systems of support and access to resources. CT members will include administrators and school-based mental health professionals (such as school counselors, school nurses, school social workers, and school psychologists). Teams may also include school resource officers, support staff, teachers, and community-based resources as appropriate.

One member of this team shall be designated as the suicide prevention coordinator to act as the point of contact for issues relating to suicide prevention and policy implementation. All staff members will report students they believe to be at risk for suicide to the suicide prevention coordinator or appropriate school-based mental health professional if the coordinator is unavailable.

If the LEA has a behavioral risk assessment team, a threat assessment team, or any similar team that monitors students considered “at risk”, those teams must immediately contact the suicide prevention coordinator if the team has identified a student who might be at risk for self-harm or suicide.

Intervention/Crisis Response: Strategies and Protocols for Supporting Students at Possible Risk for Suicide

Identification of Students Who May Be at Risk for Suicide

Any school employee who becomes aware that a student could be at risk for suicide will respond immediately by notifying the suicide prevention coordinator, whether the concern has been personally witnessed, disclosed by the student verbally or in writing, or reported by a student’s peer or another source. If the suicide prevention coordinator is unavailable, they will notify the appropriate school-based mental health professional or designee. The school-based mental health professional shall see the student to assess risk and facilitate referral if necessary. If there is not a school-based mental health professional available, the school administrator or designee shall address the situation according to LEA protocol until an appropriately qualified professional is available.

Crisis Response Procedures

Any LEA employee who has a reasonable belief that a student may be at-risk for suicide, even though the student may not be demonstrating suicidal behavior as defined in this policy, will take the following steps (See also: Appendix D):

1. **Ensure that the student is in the presence of an adult.** If they are not with the student, make every effort to locate the student immediately. Once the student is located or if they are with the student, find another employee to stay with the student to ensure their safety. If the student is not located quickly, enlist another employee to continue efforts to locate the student while proceeding to step two.
2. **Notify the suicide prevention coordinator or designee.** If the suicide prevention coordinator is unavailable, they will notify the appropriate school-based mental health professional, administrator, or designee. If the employee cannot reach any of these CT members, the employee will contact the student’s parent/guardian. If the parent/guardian is also unavailable, or at the parent’s/guardian’s request, the employee will contact emergency services. The employee may also contact the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline by calling or texting 988 or chatting at 988lifeline.org/chat for assistance.

When the suicide prevention coordinator, appropriate school-based mental health professional, administrator, or designee receives notification that a student may be at risk for suicide, they will take the following steps (See also: Appendix E):

1. **Ensure student is in the presence of an adult.** If the student has not yet been located or leaves after being located, contact the parent/guardian IMMEDIATELY to explain the LEA’s concern.
2. **Assess risk.** If the student has been located, the appropriately trained designated school staff

(e.g., school psychologist, school social worker, school counselor, or trained school administrator) will assess risk to determine whether the student is at-risk for suicide.

3. **Contact parent/guardian.** A member of the CT shall reach out to the student's parents/guardians regarding their student's safety and well-being any time a student is identified as having any level of risk for suicide. These interactions will be documented.
4. **Determine appropriate action** in consultation with the student's parent/guardian, including whether to call emergency services and/or a mobile crisis response team. If the CT member would like additional guidance on what to do in a given situation, they may contact the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline to speak to a trained crisis specialist.
5. **Implement the appropriate response.** If the parent/guardian is unwilling or unable to support the student's mental health concerns or if there is any doubt regarding the student's safety, local mental health providers and/or law enforcement may need to be engaged, and a report may need to be made to the Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline.

After the immediate crisis is resolved, the CT will meet to evaluate the team's implementation of the crisis plan.

A CT member will follow up with students who have been identified as being at risk of suicide and their parents/guardians to discuss support and safety systems, coping skills, and collaborative ways to support the student. This may include making connections with resources available within the school and community as needed. If applicable, the LEA will request permission from the parent/guardian to consult with the student's medical, behavioral, and/or mental health provider(s) to assist with determining appropriate interventions and support.

Considerations

Confidentiality

While confidentiality is important, students should know that when there is risk of suicide, safety comes first. Employees will not promise students that information they share will be kept private when the information is relevant to the student's safety or the safety of another person. Employees are required to share with the CT any information that may be relevant in determining whether a student is at risk of suicide.

Release of a student's individually identifiable education records will be made in accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). In accordance with FERPA, information contained in a student's education records may be revealed at any time to the student's parents/guardians and school personnel who have a legitimate interest in the information. Education records may be shared with other appropriate persons when necessary to protect the health or safety of the student or others.

Abuse and Neglect

If any employee of the LEA has reasonable cause to believe a student has been or may be subjected to abuse or neglect or observes the student being subjected to conditions or circumstances that would reasonably result in abuse or neglect, the employee will contact the Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline in accordance with law and board policy.

Students Attending Virtually (Online Learners)

The LEA will follow procedures set forth in this policy with enrolled students who receive some or all of their education virtually through online learning providers, as defined in [Section 161.670, RSMo](#).

To the extent possible, the superintendent or designee will collaborate with the teachers hired by Missouri Course Access and Virtual School Program (MOCAP) or other online learning providers to support the well-being of the virtual learners in their courses.

Postvention Support: Protocols for Responding to Suicidal Behavior or Death by Suicide in the School Community

Response to Incidents Impacting the School Community

When the school community is impacted by the attempted suicide or death by suicide of a student, staff member, or other person in the school community, the CT will meet with other pertinent school personnel, such as the superintendent, to implement the response plan. When appropriate, the CT will confer with local community resources and professionals to identify and make available supports that may help the school community understand and process the behavior or death.

The CT and superintendent or designee will determine the appropriate procedures for informing the school community of an attempted suicide or death by suicide and the supports that will be offered. Staff and students who need immediate attention following an attempted suicide or death by suicide will be provided support and resources available through the LEA and will be given information about other resources.

Supporting Students at School Following a Suicide Attempt or Hospitalization

Students who have attempted suicide, experienced suicidal ideation, and/or been hospitalized are at greater risk and require support when returning to school.

When the CT has been made aware that a student needs support at school following a suicide attempt or hospitalization, a member of the CT will

1. Meet with the student and family prior to or upon the return date.
2. Develop a school support plan for the student.
3. Consult with student and family about communication with teachers and other staff members to ensure safety and support.
4. Meet with the student to address any ongoing concerns as needed based on the student's need and student/parent preferences.
5. Assist the student and family in finding supportive services outside of the school if necessary or desired.

Appendix A

Considerations for the Development of Policy and Procedures

Relevant State Statute

- [Section 170.047, RSMo](#) Youth suicide awareness and prevention, training for educators — guidelines — rulemaking authority.
- [Section 170.048, RSMo](#) Youth suicide awareness and prevention policy, requirements — model policy, feedback — pupil ID cards, items to be printed on.

Related [Missouri School Improvement Program \(MSIP\)](#) Standards and Indicators

- CC-1: Safe, Orderly, and Caring Environment (The school system provides a safe and caring environment that supports teaching, learning, and student success).
- TL-10: Comprehensive School Counseling Program (The school system provides school counseling services to support the career, academic, and social/emotional development of all students).
- TL-7: Multi-Tiered System of Support (The school system provides a comprehensive multi-tiered system of support that addresses the academic, emotional, behavioral, social, and physical needs of each student).

Resources Related to Suicide Prevention Education for Students

[Health Education Grade Level Expectations](#)

[Health and Family Education Academic Performance Standards](#)

[Mental Health Awareness Model Curriculum](#)

[School Counseling Curriculum](#)

Resources for Drafting and Customizing Your LEA's Policy

[After a Suicide: A Toolkit for Schools \(2nd Edition\)](#)

Guidance and tools to assist schools in developing and implementing a coordinated response to a death by suicide.

[American Foundation for Suicide Prevention](#)

The *Model School District Policy on Suicide Prevention: Model Language, Commentary, and Resources* gives educators and school administrators a comprehensive way to implement suicide prevention policies in their local community.

[Suicide Prevention Resource Center](#)

Offers online training, information on engaging in evidence-based practice and using evidence to select or develop a program, and a best practices registry.

Appendix B

Suicide Prevention, Intervention/Crisis Response, and Postvention Support Resources for Missouri Schools

Missouri 988

988 offers 24/7 access to crisis specialists trained in providing emotional support and connection to mental health and substance use services. 988 is free and confidential and you can call, text, or chat 988 for yourself or if you are worried about someone else.

- 988 Awareness materials
- Youth and School Resources (including information for parents and guardians)
- [Suicide Prevention & 988 Guide for Schools](#): information and resources related to prevention, intervention, and postvention

Missouri Behavioral Health Council

Missouri Behavioral Health Council partners with the Missouri Department of Mental Health to actively lead the development and implementation of programs, systems, and resources that unify and support statewide providers, improving access to appropriate behavioral healthcare for all Missourians. Crisis and prevention services include Mobile Crisis Response, Youth Behavioral Health Liaisons, and Behavioral Health Crisis Centers.

- [Missouri Crisis Resources Contact Directory](#): select a county to view the crisis resources serving that area

Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

The School-Based Mental Health section within the Office of College and Career Readiness provides information and resources to support staff and student mental health.

Missouri Department of Mental Health

Provides information about suicide prevention in Missouri, free suicide prevention training programs, and additional resources regarding suicide prevention and awareness.

- [Prevention Resource Network](#): Prevention Resource Centers (PRCs) cover the entire state, providing technical assistance and support to community coalitions in their service areas. Schools can reach out to their local PRCs for free suicide prevention programming, training, support, and resources.

Missouri School Counselor Association Crisis Manual

This document is intended to help educators and administrators plan for crisis situations before they arise and offers sample procedures, protocols, and templates related to crisis preparedness, intervention, evaluation, and special circumstances.

Missouri Suicide Prevention Network

MSPN leads statewide suicide prevention efforts, developing and implementing Missouri's Suicide Prevention Plan. Additional resources include

- Directory of suicide prevention tools and resources
- Training directory with various types of suicide prevention trainings by region

Appendix C

Best Practice Guidelines for Training or Professional Development

Pursuant to [Section 170.047, RSMo](#), DESE has developed the following guidelines suitable for training or professional development in youth suicide awareness and prevention based upon best practices within the field of suicide prevention. Section 170.047, RSMo, allows for all teachers, principals, and licensed educators to count two contact hours of professional development annually for participation in training regarding suicide prevention, including self-review of suicide prevention materials. Suggested avenues for professional development include LEA-led training, access to web-based training, or training provided by other LEAs, organizations, or health professionals.

- Training should be provided to new staff when they are hired and to all staff at the beginning of each school year along with a review of the LEA's policy, protocols, and procedures for suicide awareness, prevention, intervention, and response.
- Annual professional development should include up-to-date information regarding risk and protective factors, warning signs, response procedures including referring students to the appropriate personnel, and postvention support as well as additional information regarding groups of students at elevated risk for suicide.
- Staff should be made aware of available resources related to mental health awareness promotion, early intervention, and targeted supports, such as:
 - the Suicide Prevention & 988 Guide for Schools
 - Missouri's Crisis Continuum (988 Lifeline, Mobile Crisis Response Team, and behavioral health crisis centers) and
 - mental and behavioral health supports available through the local education agency and community providers, such as certified community behavioral health clinics/organizations and community mental health centers.
- In addition to the annual and ongoing training for all staff who interact with students, it is recommended that the LEA's school-based mental health professionals (school counselors, school nurses, school social workers, and school psychologists) and crisis team members participate in regular professional development in current best practices in assessing risk and crisis intervention, as applicable to their role.

Appendix D

Crisis response procedures for any employee concerned that a student may be at risk for suicide

Employee may also contact the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline for assistance by calling or texting 988 or chatting at 988lifeline.org/chat.

IF THE SUICIDE PREVENTION COORDINATOR/ DESIGNEE IS AVAILABLE

1. Ensure student is in the presence of an adult.
2. Notify suicide prevention coordinator (or designee).
3. End of responsibility for employee made aware of student concern.

IF THE SUICIDE PREVENTION COORDINATOR/ DESIGNEE IS NOT AVAILABLE

1. Ensure student is in the presence of an adult.
2. If the suicide prevention coordinator (or designee) is unavailable, notify the appropriate school-based mental health professional, administrator, or other crisis team member.
3. End of responsibility for employee made aware of student concern.

IF THE DESIGNATED CRISIS TEAM MEMBER IS NOT AVAILABLE

1. Ensure student is in the presence of an adult.
2. If unable to notify any designated crisis team member, contact student's parent/guardian.
3. End of responsibility for employee made aware of student concern.

IF NEITHER SUICIDE PREVENTION COORDINATOR/DESIGNEE/CRISIS TEAM NOR PARENT/GUARDIAN ARE AVAILABLE

1. Ensure student is in the presence of an adult.
2. If parent/guardian is unavailable, contact emergency services.
3. End of responsibility for employee made aware of student concern.

Appendix E

Crisis response procedures for designated crisis team member(s) upon receiving notification that a student may be at risk for suicide

Crisis team may contact the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline to speak with a trained crisis specialist for additional guidance by calling or texting 988 or chatting at 988lifeline.org/chat.

STUDENT IS NOT LOCATED

1. If student has not yet been located or has left the presence of an adult, contact the parent/guardian IMMEDIATELY.
2. Continue to look for student on campus.
3. Contact emergency services if needed.
4. When student is located, follow steps in applicable scenario to the right.

PARENT/GUARDIAN IS AVAILABLE FOR CONSULTATION

1. Ensure student remains in the presence of an adult.
2. Meet with student to assess risk for suicide.
3. Contact parent/guardian regarding student's safety and well-being and consult with them regarding appropriate action.
4. Implement the agreed-upon response.
5. End of responsibility for designated crisis team member(s).

PARENT/GUARDIAN IS UNAVAILABLE OR UNABLE TO SUPPORT STUDENT'S NEEDS

1. Ensure student remains in the presence of an adult.
2. Meet with student to assess risk for suicide.
3. If parent/guardian is unavailable or is unable to meet the student's needs, contact emergency services.
4. Involve other entities as necessary, following district protocol (e.g., law enforcement, mental health providers, Children's Division).
5. End of responsibility for designated crisis team member(s).